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POLITICAL CIRCUIT

By DAVID B. WILSON

Ted's views: then and now

The date was Aug. 21, 1968, a hot Wednesday afternoon with the national television vans drawn up alongside Kimball Hall at Holy Cross College in Worcester.

The occasion was the emergence of Sen. Edward M. Kennedy from 10 weeks of introspection and mourning for his slain brother Robert. The news in his speech was that he would not retire from public life, that he would "pick up a fallen standard."

A thousand miles to the west, David Dellinger, Tom Hayden and Rennie Davis were marshaling their exotic forces and Chicago Mayor Richard J. Daley had arranged for more conventional troops. A Kennedy-for-President boomlet was about to begin.

Back in Worcester, Kennedy set forth his proposals to end the war in Vietnam. This morning, some 13 months later, they seem worth recalling in the aftermath to Kennedy's attack last week on the war policy of the Nixon Administration.

"Specifically," said the senator, "our government should undertake as soon as possible:

"First, to end unconditionally all bombing of North Vietnam; second, to then negotiate with Hanoi the mutual withdrawal from South Vietnam of all foreign forces, both allied and North Vietnamese; third, to accompany this withdrawal with whatever help we can give to the South Vietnamese in the building of a viable political, economic and legal structure that will not promptly collapse upon our departure; and fourth, to demonstrate to both Hanoi and Saigon the sincerity of our intentions by significantly decreasing this year the level of our military activity and military personnel in the South.

"These steps would enable us to end our participation in this war with honor, having fulfilled our commitment to prevent a North Vietnamese military takeover of the South and having left the future of South Vietnam to the self-determination of the South Vietnamese people. Under this plan, neither Hanoi nor Washington would try in Paris to either require, or rule out, a coalition government; to either supervise or suppress election procedures; or to name, portfolio by portfolio, the occupants of individual ministerial posts . . ."

Well, on Oct. 31 last, President Johnson stopped the bombing of North Vietnam, as he had stopped most of it the previous Spring.

President Nixon has offered Hanoi mutual withdrawal.

President Nixon has ordered 60,000 troops unilaterally withdrawn. He clearly wants to continue and speed up withdrawals.

President Nixon has not only made no objection to a coalition government but has stated that one would be acceptable to the United States. He proposes free, internationally supervised elections in South Vietnam to choose such a government.

Indeed, current United States policy in South Vietnam resembles Kennedy's proposals of pre-convention 1968 with an exactitude that approaches the congruent.

Of course, times change, and circumstances alter cases, and complexities proliferate with semantic difficulties, and, y'know . . .

But for Kennedy, as he did the other night, to tell the country and the millions who look to him for leadership that "The Vietnam policy of today is the discredited policy of the past" is to ignore history and his own past performance.

Last week in South Boston, Kennedy said that the question of who should join in governing South Vietnam during an election "is what this war is all about." And he said that as long as we refuse to consider the continued control of the Thieu government a negotiable question "there can be no peaceful solution."

The senator presumably has formed these conclusions recently, or else, one assumes, he would have expounded them earlier.

One seeks in vain in last year's text and this year's for any suggestion from the senator that the National Liberation Front or the government of North Vietnam bear at least some of the burden and responsibility for ending the slaughter that afflicts their compatriots even more cruelly than it does ours.

No, the senator appears to be expending so much wrath upon the Johnson-Nixon implementation of his own 1968 formulae that he has none left for the enemy.